

Part slumber party, part therapy, all fun: an Indiana girls' only getaway.

By Sally Campbell Grout

Whether it's dining with someone who understands the medicinal value of chocolate, or shopping with someone who understands that you don't quit until the stores close, a weekend with girlfriends can provide unlimited opportunities to relax, laugh, and be yourself. Fortunately, Indiana provides plenty of places to enjoy those people who blur the line between "sister" and "friend."

Crank some girl music and go.

Here's a crazy concept. Take a road trip with someone who will actually ask for directions if you get lost. Not that you will when you take a leisurely drive along the Ohio River Scenic Byway (800-489-4474), designated as a National Scenic Byway in 1996. Twisting, turning and rolling for 302 miles along Indiana's southern border, the byway offers some incredible views of the mighty Ohio River. (At times, you're merely feet away!) It also leads you to some storied living towns. Among them: historic Newburgh (812-853-2815). This town, settled in 1803, boasts antique and specialty shops, walking tours, restaurants, and a riverfront walkway.

Put the "leisurely" back in lunch.

For guys, lunch is that meal you inhale between breakfast and dinner. For women, lunch is (or should be) a social event. And one of Indiana's most perfect places to gather: the Twigs & Sprigs Tearoom at the Historic Stream Cliff Herb Farm in Commiskey (812-346-5859). Enjoy a relaxing meal from a menu that includes soups, salads, desserts and even edible flowers. Or, time your visit for afternoon country tea. Don't linger too long, however, because you'll want time to stroll among the quilt-shaped gardens and the thousands of herbs and flowers. And where there's a girls' day out, there's bound to be shopping. Browse through four garden and craft shops: Country Store, Summer Kitchen, Aunt Betty's Cabin, and the Potting Shed.

Power shopping, city style.

Ladies, start your charge cards. Indianapolis is the place for serious shoppers to get the job done. Downtown, Circle Centre Mall (317-681-8000) serves up four floors of upscale shopping that span a couple of city blocks. Shop at Nordstrom, Parisian, and many other great stores. A food court and several restaurants give you options for refueling before you head to the north side of town and the Fashion Mall at Keystone (317-574-4002). Here, Saks Fifth Avenue, Restoration Hardware, J. Jill and Pottery Barn Kids are just a few of the many stores that draws shoppers from

miles around. For dinner, try one of several restaurants, including P. F. Chang's, Keystone Grill, and The Cheesecake Factory.

Antiques to go.

As any married woman will tell you, his old stuff is junk; her old stuff is treasure. So if you've convinced him to get rid of his junk to make room for more treasure, the place to find it is along Indiana's Famous Antique Alley Trails (800-828-8414). Running through the eastern part of the state, the two trails combined take you to more than 1,400 dealers. Trail #1, with more than 900 dealers, follows The Old National Road (that's U.S. 40, also a National Scenic Byway) from Richmond to Knightstown and takes you back to Richmond on State Road 38. Among the "not to be missed" stops: Webb's Antique Mall (765-855-2489), Indiana's largest. Trail #2 follows scenic US 27 north to more even antique-filled destinations.

The campus is only part of the picture.

Not that a woman can't be a rabid sports fan. But when she thinks of Lafayette, she may realize there's more ways to spend a day than watching the Purdue Boilermakers work up a sweat. She may like to bring a few friends to explore Historic Downtown Lafayette-West Lafayette (800-872-6569). This is simply a great place to walk, talk, and duck in and out of the shops and galleries, including Kathy's Homemade Kandies, 1st Class Clutter, and Lafayette Renaissance Academy. Enjoy turn-of-the-century architecture, historic neighborhoods, and one-of-a-kind restaurants, such as Lafayette Brewing Company (765-742-2591) and Triple XXX Family Restaurant (765-743-5373), Indiana's first drive-in restaurant. Self-guiding walking tours are also available.

A colorful day in Brown County.

It's easy to see why T.C. Steele and his famed "Hoosier Group" of artists were drawn to Brown County (800-753-3255); the area is filled with natural beauty. But it's also filled with hundreds of man-made places to explore, including Brown County's Old Country Store (812-988-4554), the 16-shop Antique Alley (812-988-4554), and Nashville House (877-374-3317), home of one of Indiana's favorite tasty treats, fried biscuits. And to see some of the work the area inspired, visit the T.C. Steele State Historic Site (812-988-2785). Here, you can see more than 70 original T.C. Steele paintings, tour the studio, house and gardens, and hike the 92-acre nature preserve.

This time, leave the paperback at home.

There's plenty of appeal to sitting on the beach with a good book, but it can't compare to basking in the sun with good friends. So bring your buddies, your beach towels, and plenty of diet soda to the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore (800-959-9174). Here, in 15,000 acres of protected parkland, nearly 25 miles of warm sand stretch along the shores of Lake

Michigan. But the Indiana Dunes is much more than a beach. Filled with plants, trees, birds, bugs and other living things, it's an ideal place to discover some nature at work. One of the most fascinating sites is Mount Baldy, the area's largest "wandering" sand dune, which is moving south at a rate of about four to five feet per year.

With a name like "Resort" it has to be good.

Need a gathering place where you can simply sit, talk, and enjoy the view? The Culver Cove Resort & Conference Center (800-THE-COVE) in Culver can accommodate you. Here, the rooms are actually luxury condos, with kitchenettes, fireplaces, living rooms, and decks with a view of Lake Maxinkuckee, Indiana's second largest lake. In addition to the lake's recreational opportunities, the community of Culver offers restaurants, golf, and one of the nation's most respected college-prep boarding schools, Culver Academies. Tour the beautiful grounds, and be sure to stay for one of the Sunday precision military marches, that include silent drill teams and equestrian troops.

Do you spell it "spa"? Or "spaaaaahhhh"?

At French Lick Springs Resort and Spa (800-503-3577), you'll find plenty of active ways to fill the day, such as golf, horseback riding, and bowling. But save that for another time. Your girls' getaway is a chance for all of you to unwind at the resort's spa. Relax with aromatherapy, a body message, and a facial. Treat yourself to a manicure and a pedicure. Restore your skin with a seaweed wrap. And test the waters from the mineral springs with a mineral water bath. These special waters have drawn people to the area since 1840.

Now, about that chocolate...

Because no girls' getaway would be complete without chocolate and plenty of it, you may want to consider taking time to stop at a few (or all) of these destinations.

At South Bend Chocolate Company (800-301-4961) the 16,000 square foot factory, complete with an outlet store, chocolate museum, and café, is open for tours. Call ahead for an appointment.

At Wolf's Homemade Candies (888-98-CANDY) in Attica, For 75 years, that have been handed down from one generation to the next for 75 years. You can order boxes in sizes ranging from eight pieces to 140.

Lebanon is home to two incredible chocolate resources. Donaldson's Finer Chocolates (765-482-3334) is just a stone's throw off Interstate 65 and well worth the stop. Or, you can plan ahead and call to set up a tour. Group size is limited to 20-25 people; tours cover the history of the

company and the making of the chocolate. See the candy makers at work, and taste the “chocolate bark” that’s made on marble slabs while you watch. David Alan Chocolatier (800-428-2310) is truffle lovers’ paradise. The chocolate covered fruits and nuts are scrumptious, but it’s the truffles that you’ll talk about forever. Pre-planned tours are also available.

In Union City, Ghyslain Chocolatier, Inc. (866-449-7524) makes such high-end delights as chocolates filled with smooth ganache, fresh fruit purees, liqueurs and nuts. Perhaps the most unique offerings are the signature hand-painted chocolates—a special technique using paint brushes and vibrant colors making each piece as spectacular to see as it is to taste.

Want to know more?

You’ll find dozens of other Indiana getaway ideas at enjoyindiana.com.